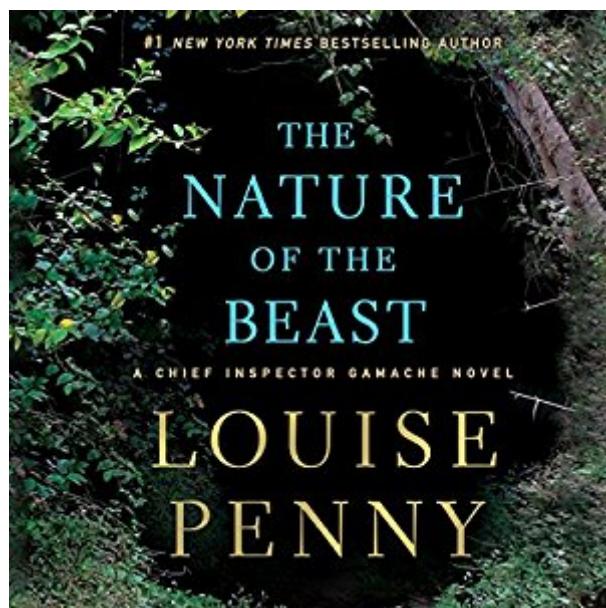


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The Nature Of The Beast: A Chief Inspector Gamache Novel



Synopsis

Hardly a day goes by when nine-year-old Laurent Lepage doesn't cry wolf. From alien invasions to walking trees to winged beasts in the woods to dinosaurs spotted in the village of Three Pines, his tales are so extraordinary no one can possibly believe him. Including Armand and Reine-Marie Gamache, who now live in the little Quebec village. But when the boy disappears, the villagers are faced with the possibility that one of his tall tales might have been true. And so begins a frantic search for the boy and the truth. What they uncover deep in the forest sets off a sequence of events that leads to murder, leads to an old crime, leads to an old betrayal. Leads right to the door of an old poet. And now it is now, writes Ruth Zardo. And the dark thing is here. A monster once visited Three Pines. And put down deep roots. And now, Ruth knows, it is back. Armand Gamache, the former head of homicide for the Sûreté du Québec, must face the possibility that in not believing the boy, he himself played a terrible part in what happens next.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I've read many of the wonderful reviews this book has received, but I must respectfully disagree. I think this is by far the weakest of Louise Penny's books. I realize that the 'supergun' did exist in the Canadian forests during the Cold War, but I found the constant discussions about this weapon very dull. Details about the gun, its invention and inventor filled page after page of the novel, and I found myself skimming just to get through all this unnecessary background information. I craved more news about Penny's wonderful characters: How were Armand and Reine-Marie adjusting to life in

Three Pines? How was Clara coping with the loss of her husband? Please tell me more about Ruth and Myrna, Gabri and Olivier. I read Penny's books to catch up on these old friends, and my curiosity was not satisfied with this novel. There was some character interaction, but it mostly dealt with the supergun, and I just couldn't get excited about that. At all. I will still be first in line to order the next installment of the Three Pines stories. Until "The Nature of the Beast" I had never been disappointed by Louise Penny's stories. I'll be back for more.

One thing that distinguishes Louise Penny's mysteries from most others is that she not only takes murder for the tragedy it is, but she also explores the emotional state of the killer and treats the killer as a damaged human being, not a cold-blooded monster. I don't think it's a spoiler to say that there are several suspects in this case and that more than one is depicted as lacking any humanity. I value characterization above all, so for me, a book is less engaging if characters don't seem human. Days after reading the book, I'm still puzzled by Louise Penny's choice to go in a direction so different from her trademark style. I was just reading an interview with her in Book Page, where she confirms that her books are about the exploration of human nature and says that what she's interested in is "what would make a real-life human being do something like that." I wish she'd stuck with that mindset in this case. She does spend time exploring the very human problems of some of the central cast of regulars, but not a lot and, to be frank, I thought her insights into Ruth Zardo's issues seemed murky and didn't make a lot of sense. This novel is more toward the thriller than mystery, even though it's set in the bucolic village of Three Pines. Penny can do thriller; I'm thinking of the extreme tension in *How the Light Gets In*, for example. But this doesn't measure up to that. The pacing was off and the impending disaster didn't seem very believable. (And yes, I know that the thriller aspect of the plot is based on real events.) Those are the disappointments. But it's not all bad news. All the Three Pines regulars are there, as well as Jean-Guy Beauvoir and Isabelle Lacoste. And, what I've always wished for, we get to see more of Reine-Marie. Penny also shows us some possibilities for future books, which is intriguing. I am hoping she will consider future stories featuring Beauvoir and Lacoste even more strongly than in this one. All in all, for me this was a fair-to-middling book in the series. OK, but not truly engrossing or a page-turner, for the reasons I discuss above, and I will be disappointed if Penny continues in this vein. I'm hoping the next time we get more of her superb character studies that explore the heights and depths of what it means to be human.

It certainly is "full of surprises," the same way a fairy tale is. This one is simply too fantastic. It's not

believable, and it trades on the previously well-established and realistic characters to trudge on to its sad and scary ending. Maybe Penny will snap to for her next outing with Inspector Gamache, which I previously have enjoyed to the full.

I have been such a promoter of Louise Penny's books, and thought the previous one superb, but found this one much less interesting. Perhaps it was just the basic plot line that I found uninteresting. Perhaps I am getting annoyed at Clara always having food bits in her hair. That just seems so unnecessary and unrealistic. Of course I love Gamache and the other characters. I thought Ruth was somewhat better done than in previous books, but would like to see more of her essential poetic self. I was interested to read the note at the end about the factual nature of the big gun; it might have helped to have read it first.

Nature of the Beast has all the wisdom, perfect characterization and solid crime solving that you would expect from a Three Pines novel by Louise Penny. It also has repugnant evil-doers, international thrills and one of the most masterful plot climaxes I've ever read. The beast leitmotif, so integral to the story and its major themes, is practically a work of art in itself. At times I grew complacent catching a glint right before another penny dropped, but half of these were misdirections and besides who doesn't like to feel clever sometimes. I'm becoming stingy with five star ratings, but this one I give without reservation.

The complexity of the characters in this beloved, of mine, series never ceases to amaze me. It is easily a ten star novel but we are only allowed five so... Chief Inspector Gamache and wife have settled into Three Pines as they adjust to their retirements. All the usual friends are there to greet us, the reader, plus, as would be expected, new friends are made. One new friend, a wee lad, Laurent Lepage is possessing an imagination that knows few boundaries. He adores coming into the village shouting 'Aliens,' or 'lost child,' when he craves attention. Of course, Laurent adores Armand Gamache. The village is tiring of this however, when Laurent comes racing in telling tales of an impossibility. Armand gently says, 'No' and drives the boy home. When Laurent disappears, Armand must question himself, what if he had listened and followed the boy. The gentleness of a attention-seeking boy leads us into one of the deepest and terrifying journeys that madness of men can bring. Again, I bring up the complexity of the characters in this book. We learn new secrets and realize just what happens in the minds of murderers. Excellent novel.

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